



Welcome by Executive Dean, Bond University Faculty of Law - Day 2

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Welcome – Day 2

National Wellness for Law Forum, 16 February 2018

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to Bond University, and welcome to Day 2 of the 7th National Wellness for Law Forum. My name is Professor Nick James, and I am the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Law here at Bond. I would first like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land upon which we are gathered, the Yugambeh - Kombumerri peoples, and on your behalf pay our collective respects to elders past and present.

We have two types of person here in the room this morning. About half of you were here yesterday. And the other half of you have just arrived. How to deliver a welcome that acknowledges both groups simultaneously?

To the first group: Welcome back! Wasn't yesterday great? I hope you enjoyed the dinner, and had a good rest. Today is all about wellness in legal practice. I am confident it will complement and enhance many of the things we talked about yesterday. Now, there's a bunch of people here who weren't at the Forum yesterday, so I will rely upon your patience and understanding as I repeat myself, just a little. Bear with me.

To the other group: Welcome! Thank you for making your way to Bond to participate in this very important conversation about wellness and resilience within the legal profession.

This Forum is an initiative of the Wellness Network for Law. The Network is a community of legal academics, practitioners and students who are committed to addressing the high levels of psychological distress experienced in law; and promoting wellness at law school, in the legal academy, and in the profession.

The Network was established as part of Professor Rachael Field's National Teaching Fellowship in 2010, and has thrived due to the support of numerous academics and professionals, as well as the Tristan Jepson Memorial Foundation and its founder Marie Jepson. The Network is now hosted by the Bond University Centre for Professional Legal Education. Here at Bond we place an enormous emphasis upon the quality of the student experience, and law student wellness is a priority, so we are very proud to be associated with the Network.

This is the 7th National Wellness for Law Forum. It is the latest instalment in a conversation that has been taking place for many years internationally, but which in Australia gained momentum with the publication in 2009 of the Brain and Mind Research Institute's report, *Courting the Blues*. This survey of 741 law students from 13 universities, 924 solicitors and 756 barristers found that more than one in four barristers, more than one in three solicitors and almost half of all law students were at a high or very high risk of suffering from a diagnosable mental illness. Since the publication of the report, further Australian research has been conducted to affirm the report's findings, to identify the factors that contribute to law student and lawyer distress, and to identify measures that successfully promote wellness in law.

We have learned, for example, about the important role played by motivation. If a law student is studying law or a lawyer is practising law not because they are genuinely interested in the study or practice of law, but because they want a lucrative career, are they are trying to meet the expectations of their family, or they seek the status and prestige associated with being a lawyer, we say that they are extrinsically motivated. However, if a law student is studying law or a lawyer is practising law because they are genuinely interested in the study or practice of law, or they aspire to use the law to help others and effect legal and social change, we say that they are intrinsically motivated. There are good reasons to believe that law students and lawyers who are extrinsically motivated are more likely to experience stress, anxiety, and depression than those who are intrinsically motivated.

Here are some of the other things we learned yesterday. (And while I would like to take credit for these notes, the truth is I pinched them from Twitter: thank you Tweeters, including Lloyd England, Stephen Tang, Becky Batagol and Claire Holland. #WellnessFL18

- SO. We learned that the proportion of law students at risk of depression, anxiety and depression may in fact be increasing, despite the introduction of numerous wellness measures in Australian law schools
- We learned that 23% of law students and 18% of lawyers self-reported having eating weight and shape concerns to a level of clinical significance.
- We learned that it is easy for law students to develop a 'tunnel vision' about where the law degree can and will take them.
- We learned that if we want to improve law student wellbeing we should focus upon improving course design and teaching practice. We need to engage in systematic curriculum reform, and not be distracted by facile wellness measures.
- We learned that many law schools across the country are in fact engaging in this sort of systematic curriculum reform.
- What else? Wellness is best understood not as the absence of markers of psychological distress but as participating in the dimensions of human flourishing in a variety of ways.
- The dominant motivation of new law students is to help people and improve the world.
- Values are central to law students developing a strong sense of professionalism. If we want lawyers to be ethical, we need them to be well
- And it is likely, although not certain, that universities owe a legal duty of care to their students to put in place mechanisms to protect them from psychological harm.

Today we shift our focus slightly, and consider more closely the issue of wellness and resilience within the practicing profession. I am looking forward to drawing the connections between the discussions yesterday, and the discussions today.

And on that note, I had you over to your MC and host for the day, the wonderful Professor Rachael Field.